

1874, to the Editor of *The Medium*, with the knowledge and approval of both Varley and Crookes, that the experiments '... prove in many ways that Miss Cook is inside the cabinet, while "Katie" is outside'. The charitable reader will ascribe this difference to Florence's mediumship being genuine, whilst Mary's was fraudulent. The more cynical will suspect that, whilst both were fraudulent, Florence had, what poor Mary lacked, viz., a 'boy-friend', skilled in electrical technique and willing to put it at her disposal. That hypothetical 'boy-friend' might well have been Crookes; but it might equally well have been some other member of her circle (if such there were) with the requisite electrical knowledge and technique.

I can make no claims to expert knowledge of electrical theory or technique, and I must confess frankly that I find the whole business of Varley's electrical tests of Florence Cook extremely puzzling. There must be members of the S.P.R. with far better qualifications than I to express an opinion and do experiments. I have written these notes in the hope that some of them will be moved to come forward with comments. It would be most desirable to repeat the experiments, under as nearly as possible the same conditions as Varley describes (sovereigns and all!) with some person who deliberately tries his or her best to cheat the control; and thus to establish what can and what cannot be done in the way of evasion.

FOREIGN COMMENTS ON FLORENCE COOK'S MEDIUMSHIP

BY GEORGE ZORAB

TAKEN generally, foreign comments coming from persons not resident in Great Britain or the United States are not based on practical experience of the manifestations of Miss Cook's mediumship during the years previous to Crookes's investigation of the Katie King phenomena. As far as I am aware there are only two exceptions to this.

The first is the Russian aristocrat, Mr A. Aksakoff (1832-1903), who had connections with the Imperial Russian Court and was a great supporter of the Spiritualist Movement. Aksakoff came over to England in the autumn of 1873, and availed himself of this opportunity to secure an invitation to attend two of Miss Cook's materialization seances: one held at the medium's home at Hackney, and another at Mr J. C. Luxmoore's house. Several years later he published a rather full account of the former seance (the one on October 22, 1873), mentioning the fact that Mr Crookes at the time did not yet believe in the possibility of full form materialization. In connection with this it is rather curious to note that the sitting at Mr Luxmoore's house attended by Mr Aksakoff took place on 28 October, and that we have Mr Dunphy's account¹ of that very same seance telling us that Mr Crookes was present at the sitting and that he had a good look at *Katie King* when the phantom came out of the cabinet. Are we perhaps to suppose, in view of the coincidence just mentioned, that Aksakoff, after his successful sitting with Florence where he was allowed to see the darkly clad medium only a few seconds after he had been in the presence of the phantom, completely clothed in white, had induced Crookes to be present (for the first time?) at one of the full form Katie King seances?

As I believe Aksakoff's report may help in forming an all-round picture of Miss Cook's mediumship, and may be compared with a later report of the German Dr Friese (6) who described several sittings he had with Florence when her materialization was named *Marie*, I herewith translate Aksakoff's impressions as he printed them in the German edition of his best known book (1).

¹ 'Modern Mysteries', *London Society*, February 1874, 166 ff.

... Here I would like to give a report of my meeting with *Katie King*, a report which so far has never been published outside Russia. It was in the year 1873. Mr Crookes had already published his article on 'psychical energy', but he did not yet believe in 'materializations', for he declared that he would only become convinced of their real existence after he had seen the materialized full form together with the medium at the same time.

As I was staying in London at the time, I naturally desired to observe myself these unique phenomena. After I had been introduced to Mr Cook's family, the latter kindly invited me to be present at a seance to be held on 22 Oct. The seance was held in a small room in use as a dining-room. The medium, Miss Florence Cook, sat down on a chair placed in a niche, formed by the fire-place and a corner of the room, and behind a curtain that, hung on little rings, could be moved to and fro. Mr Luxmoore who was in charge of the seance, asked me to examine carefully the manner in which he had bound the medium a moment before. Mr Luxmoore insisted that he considered such measures of control to be an absolute necessity. He had bound each hand of the medium separately with twined tape and sealed the knots. He then drew the medium's hands behind her back, and bound them together with the ends of the same piece of tape, once again sealing the knots. Finally he bound her once again with a long piece of tape which was drawn outside the cabinet curtains and then under and through a copper staple nailed in the floor and finally fastened to the table, beside which Mr Luxmoore was sitting. Bound in the manner described the medium could not get up from her chair without pulling on the tape fastened to the table.

The room was lighted by a small lamp placed behind a book. We had not waited more than 15 minutes when the curtain was drawn aside sufficiently to show us a human figure standing upright close to the drawn curtain. It was completely clad in white; the face uncovered but the hair enveloped in a white veil; hands and arms were bare. That was *Katie*. In her hand she held an object that she handed to Mr Luxmoore with the words: 'This is intended for Mr Aksakoff. He may have every drop of it!' General laughter followed. It is clear that our first meeting in no way showed any mystical characteristics. 'Where does this little bottle come from?', I asked. 'From the kitchen!', *Katie* answered. As you see, this answer, too, was quite prosaic. All the time the sitting lasted *Katie* chattered away with the sitters, her voice being very low, as if she was whispering all the time. Several times she demanded: 'Do ask me questions, reasonable questions, that is!' Taking the hint, I asked her: 'Can't you show me your medium?' She replied: 'Yes, certainly, come here very quickly and have a look!'

In that very instant I stood up from my chair, and drew back the curtain. I had only to take five steps to reach the curtain but the white-clad figure had disappeared. In front of me, in a dark corner, the figure of the medium, clothed in a black dress, was sitting in an

armchair. She was wearing a black silk dress, and because of this I could not see her quite clearly. As soon as I was seated again, *Katie's* white-clad figure appeared once more, standing next to the curtain, and she asked me: 'Did you have a good look?' I replied: 'Not so good, for it was rather dark behind the curtain.' 'Then take the lamp with you and go and have a look immediately!' Within a second I stood behind the curtain, holding the lamp in my hand. Every trace of *Katie* had disappeared. I found myself alone and facing the medium who, in a deep trance, was sitting on a chair, with both her hands bound fast behind her back. The light, shining on the medium's face started to produce its usual effect, i.e. the medium began to sigh and to awake. Behind the curtain an interesting dialogue started between the medium, becoming more and more awake, and *Katie* who wanted to put her medium to sleep again. But *Katie* had to give way, she said *Goodbye*, and then silence followed.

The seance had come to an end. Mr Luxmoore insisted that I should carefully test whether all bindings, knots and seals were still intact. I found everything absolutely intact, and when it was suggested that I cut the medium free, it was only with difficulty that I could get the scissors under the tape, so tightly were her hands bound together.

I was given the opportunity to observe *Katie* for the second time during a sitting held in Mr Luxmoore's house on 28 October. The same control measures were taken, and the very same *Katie* appeared again. (Vide, *The Spiritualist*, 1873, p. 381.) [pp. 264-6.]

Aksakoff (I, p. 267) then goes on to say — and he is trying to refute one of the many objections E. von Hartmann, the German philosopher, brought forward in one of his books (9) against the paranormal interpretation of the *Katie King* phenomena — that it is absurd to suggest that the persons claiming to have seen the materialization of the phantom figure (*Katie King*) were hallucinated. Aksakoff assures von Hartmann that the photographs taken of the phantom looked exactly as the *Katie King* with whom he had come into contact during the two sittings he had attended. Aksakoff (I, p. 267) also mentions the fact that Crookes showed him the photograph he (Crookes) took, on which *Katie King* and her medium appeared together, though unfortunately *Katie* is sitting in front of Florence Cook's head, making it invisible. Von Hartmann's insinuation that the medium on the photo could well have been a manikin is unacceptable to Aksakoff, for if true it would mean that Crookes should be regarded as a liar and a swindler.

The other exception named above was *Prins Emil of Sayn-Wittgenstein*, Adjutant-General of the Emperor of Russia. This witness has to be regarded more as a rather uncritical sitter who viewed the phantom, *Katie King*, with the eye of the sculptor he

was. The Prins was present at a seance at Mr Luxmoore's house on December 16, 1873, and in his report (*Psychische Studien*, 1874, 1, 306 ff.) expressed himself in glowing terms on Katie's ravishing beauty.

In those days, in Germany, Prins Wittgenstein's testimony seems to have carried far greater weight than the statements of William Crookes concerning the results of his investigations of Florence Cook's mediumship, however great his reputation as a scientist may have been. The German novelist, Marquardt Sauer, remarks (see: *Psychische Studien*, 1875, 2, p. 36) that though people might regard Crookes as a liar, a humbug, or a practical joker, such a possibility was out of the question in the case of the aristocrat, the Prins of Sayn-Wittgenstein. Such a highly-placed and blue-blooded gentleman could not possibly lie or play the fool. What he tells us he had seen with his own eyes and felt with his own hands (he had held Katie's hands in his own and had seen Katie's delicately formed leg up to the calf!) must be true in every way. It should also be regarded as extremely improbable that the Prins, together with the other sitters he mentions by name (in his report published in *Psychische Studien*, 1874, 1, 306 ff.) had been hallucinated, for such an event would have been as improbable and miraculous as the appearance of the phantom lady.

This remarkable opinion of a German intellectual of the 1870's, serves to show how more highly descent of princely stock was valued than the testimony of a world-famous physicist when it came to accepting the paranormal.

Aksakoff and the Prins of Sayn-Wittgenstein were the only two foreigners whom we know attended seances with Cook during the time that the materialized phantom named itself Katie King. There is another German, however, who had sittings with the then Mrs Corner soon after she had returned from China and started to give materialization seances in London. The manifesting phantom was then called *Marie*. This German gentleman, a Dr A. Friese, had several sittings in London, in 1878, and from his descriptions of these sittings (6) it is clear that the conditions prevailing during the seance and the alleged materialization phenomena differed very little from those during the Katie King period.

If Dr Friese is not mistaken in his report (his book was published for the first time in 1879, one year after his London sittings with Mrs Corner) of how he entered the cabinet and saw the medium sitting tied up in her chair only two or three seconds after the phantom Marie had disappeared behind the cabinet's curtain, it becomes more difficult to believe that Florence was fraudulent all the time. Aksakoff's and Friese's reports seem to indicate that

at least during certain occasions something of a paranormal nature occurred. Referring to Mrs Corner's exposure on the 9th of January, 1880, in the same rooms where Dr Friese had had his sittings, even the very sceptical *Graf Carl von Klinckowstroem* (7, p. 147) raises the question where the white draperies, seen on the phantom during its perambulations in the seance-room, had gone to. When the 'spirit' was gripped by George Sitwell, it appeared to be the medium in her corsets and flannel underwear. The 'spiriting' away of the white 'spirit' garments (which indeed has never been adequately explained!) may give some support to the assumption that Marie may have had some paranormal origin. The same should also apply to the Katie King apparition.

At the time (about 1890) when the existence of psi phenomena was stubbornly defended only by Spiritualists, and only one or two scientists, of some renown on the European Continent, dared to express their belief in their occurrence, the Danish psychologist, A. Lehmann, entered the field with a thick volume full of criticisms (12). His criticisms of Crookes's investigation of Florence Cook's mediumship (12, p. 334) concentrate on what he terms the highly unscientific and fiction-like reports (too few and insufficient in detail) which Crookes published on the subject. These reports (i.e. the letters to *The Spiritualist*) cannot be taken as statements enabling one to form a sound judgment about the nature of the alleged materialization phenomena. Lehmann comes to the conclusion (12, pp. 336-7) that in all probability Florence Cook took upon herself the rôle of Katie King, and when certain circumstances made it difficult to do so, introduced an associate to play Katie's part. Charmed by her youthful personality and pretty features, Crookes and his friends were not aware of being duped. Lehmann is even inclined to believe that the fraudulent practices may not have been performed consciously!

There are several inaccuracies in Lehmann's statements. For instance, he writes (12, p. 333) that Crookes chose the fifteen-year-old Florence to act as his private medium in 1872, and that she was exclusively at Crookes's disposition and that of his friends' till May 1874. Such historical inaccuracies were servilely copied out by several German authors in the following two decades (e.g. 10, pp. 284-6).

During the years between the two world wars a number of German scientists were becoming convinced of the reality of paranormal physical phenomena as the result of the various publications of Schrenck-Notzing, who was experimenting with several mediums producing materialization phenomena. These parapsychologists came forward as defenders of the authenticity

of the Katie King phenomena as described by Crookes, though the more critical minded of such defenders agreed that Crookes's reports were too inadequate to be regarded as truly scientific. (See 14, Vol. 2, pp. 816-21; 18, Vol. 2, p. 60; 17, p. 5.)

Schrenck-Notzing, the undisputed leader of German parapsychology in the 1920's even found excuses for Florence's exposure in 1880, suggesting that Mrs Corner was losing her mediumistic power and could therefore no longer produce full form materializations but only a kind of transfiguration or transmutation (paranormal production of the white 'spirit' garments which disappeared when the medium was seized). During Crookes's investigation, however, Florence's mediumship would have been at its height and there was little doubt that he observed phenomena of a truly paranormal origin (17, p. 5).

Though a critic like von Klinckowstroem (7, pp. 134-48) believed that, basing oneself on the few superficial reports Crookes published, it was a relatively easy task to point out the possibilities of Cook's fraudulent behaviour during the seances, either by personifying Katie herself or by introducing a living good-looking girl as the phantom, he had nevertheless to concede (7, p. 144 ff.) that the Varley electrical experiment should be regarded as scientifically well conducted and described, and therefore to be seriously taken into account. Klinckowstroem, after reviewing the Varley experiment but giving little attention to the one Crookes conducted in his own house, (presumably because no detailed reports exist about the latter) points out that the galvanometer's pointer dropped almost every time Katie moved her arms — a very suspicious fact. He therefore comes to the conclusion that Varley's experimental results do not give us definite proof that Katie and Florence were not one and the same person. (See also 13, p. 13.) He also suggests (7, p. 146) that Florence, by pushing the electrodes round her wrists up to her arms above the elbow (at which very moment, Klinckowstroem believes, the galvanometer dropped from 191 to 155) could then have got up and walked out of the cabinet dressed as Katie. In the author's opinion this could explain Katie's appearance outside the cabinet *one minute* after the above-mentioned drop of the galvanometer (7, p. 146). Klinckowstroem, however, does not explain how Florence was able to dress herself up so efficiently in the well-known white 'spirit' clothes in which apparently Mr Varley saw her when he exclaimed in surprise that she looked so very much like her medium.¹

In France, the controversy concerning Miss Cook's medium-

¹ *The Spiritualist*, March 20, 1874, p. 133.

ship was in the main fought out in the course of the last decade before the first world war, and after Mrs Corner's unequivocal exposure at Warsaw in June 1899 (20). In this controversy Mr Jules Bois played an important part. In 1902 Bois wrote (2, p. 342) that he did not believe in such things as 'materializations', meaning full-form materializations. He goes on to say that he had had sittings with Mrs Corner and that he had found her fraudulent, acting the part of the phantom herself.

He changed his opinion about the reality of materialization phenomena, however, after having been present at sittings with the Italian physical medium, Eusapia Paladino. In 1907 Bois wrote:

If my friends and myself have never had the chance so far of observing full form materializations like those of Katie King perceived by Sir William Crookes, we have at least obtained absolute proof that Eusapia is capable, just like the amoebae, to project outside her physical body more or less material bodily structures, such as hands that can grip you, or heads having the capacity to make an imprint in some soft substance (3, p. 26).

Though Eusapia Paladino's mediumship seemed to have convinced Bois of the reality of physical phenomena, he remained adamant in his opinion as to the fraudulent character of Katie King. Sometime between 1902 and 1904 (P. Joire who quotes him in 1909 (11, p. 423) does not give any references) Bois declared:

In London I could convince myself in an unquestionable manner of the puerile and gross fraudulent practices of the famous Florence Cook (then Mrs. Corner) who duped the honourable William Crookes with the phantom of Katie King, an entity that was no other than her sister.

In spite of the fact that Joire had already pointed out how highly improbable it was that the sister (presumably Kate Cook is meant here) could have acted the part of Katie King and got away with it in Crookes's house, the same argument was brought forward again by Mr Gustave le Bon in an article published in the *Revue Scientifique* of March 1910 and commented upon by Mr C. de Vesme in the periodical he edited, the *Annales de Sciences Psychiques* (19). Mr le Bon wrote that Bois had declared, in a lecture held in 1909, the same things I have quoted from Joire's book (11, p. 423) but with the addition that he, Bois, had witnessed full form materializations produced by Mrs Corner but that the breath of the phantom had been impregnated with a strong smell of alcohol! (19, p. 163).

In connection with the above mentioned statement of Bois, de Vesme wrote to Bois requesting him to compile a report about the sitting at which Bois was able to expose Florence Cook in such an efficient manner. Mr de Vesme mentioned at the same time that he would be pleased to place the columns of the *Annales* at Bois's disposal for the publication of the latter's paper. Bois, however, replied that he certainly intended to publish such an article as desired by de Vesme but that he would do so only at a later date and under circumstances in which his report would no longer excite any indignation (19, p. 163, note 2).

In his book (8, p. 107, note 1) Mr Trevor Hall seemed to have had an inkling — or should I rather say a vague notion? — of these quoted statements which Bois issued concerning Florence Cook's mediumship. Curiously enough Hall does not so much as mention Bois's emphatic but never authenticated claim that Katie King was no other than her sister [which one, Kate or Edith?] in disguise.

Hall also suggests that Bois did not want to publish the paper asked for by de Vesme, because Crookes was still living at the time (1910), and he may have been afraid to hurt the latter's feeling. I do not believe this suggestion to be justified. Hall seems to lose sight of the fact that de Vesme had not asked Bois to write a paper on his ideas connected with Crookes's investigations of the Katie King phenomena and how one of Florence's sisters could have been smuggled in as Katie King, but simply to give a detailed report of the manner he debunked Mrs Corner's full-form materialization, exhaling alcoholic fumes.¹ As a matter of fact, from the very beginning (1902) Bois had never bothered himself about Crookes's feelings, for he was always quite outspoken on the point of Mrs Corner's fraudulent practices. The same can be said of the Warsaw exposure (20). This report gave a detailed description of Mrs Corner's puerile attempts to stage a come-back as a materialization medium, an attempt that failed completely and showed that she was capable of conscious deceit. In view of the above we may raise the question why Bois, ten years after the Warsaw exposure, could have had any objection to report his experiences with the same medium in London, presumably in the 1890's?

As a matter of fact, Bois never did publish any detailed account of his London seances with Mrs Corner, even long after Crookes's death. Neither did he ever give the reasons for his conviction that Katie King was personified by Florence's sister, a presumption

¹ '... de bien vouloir enfin publier un récit de cette fameuse séance dans laquelle il aurait démasqué Florence Cook, ...' (19, p. 163, note 2).

that Hall never even for a moment took into consideration (8, pp. 70-3).

Another curious fact which I, for one, do not find easy to understand is what is said in relation to Bois's revelation to Mrs Eileen Garrett a few years before the former's death in 1943 (8, p. 107). Bois, at the time a believing Catholic, is described as one 'whose conscience was disturbed lest he should die without revealing the information he possessed to a sympathetic psychical researcher'. That information was that Mrs Corner had told Bois that the Crookes's seances in 1874 had been fraudulent and that she and Sir William Crookes had used them to cover up their sexual liason (8, p. 107).

Mrs Eileen Garrett told me the same facts in 1956. What I cannot understand, however, is why Bois should feel disturbed in his conscience, even though he had turned a faithful Catholic. Bois had never been a credulous Spiritualist and an adherent to the anti-Catholic doctrines of the Latin Spiritualist Movement. Right from the beginning of the century Bois had declared that Katie King had been fraudulently produced and could certainly not be regarded as a 'spirit' returned from behind the veil, a notion so dear to the convinced Spiritualist. Taking all this into consideration, one may well ask why Bois should be afraid to die without divulging what Mrs Corner had told him concerning the presumed Katie King smoke-screen put up to hide her love-affair with Crookes?

I wonder whether Mrs Garrett was indeed the first one to be told about this presumed love-affair. It is curious to note in this connection that suddenly, in 1923, a Dr A. Delmas came forward with the hypothesis that Crookes was in love with Florence Cook, and that this love so blinded his judgment that he became her dupe (16, p. 11). Nobel-prize winner C. Richet, the famous French psychical researcher, takes Delmas to task, and commenting on this hypothesis of blinding love, writes:

It is possible that Crookes was in love with Miss Florence Cook. However, I do not believe I am giving away a secret, if I say that I had the honour to call on Sir William Crookes, and that Mrs Crookes told me in an emotional voice that she had often seen Katie King, walking up to the table in the dining-room and talking with her children. Now, can we say that Lady Crookes was in love with Katie King?

And even if Crookes had admired Katie King's beauty, is that reason enough for this great and wonderful *savant* to lose his coolness of judgement? ... (16, p. 11).

Richet (15, p. 584) is convinced that Mrs Corner's exposures in 1880 and 1899 were the result of the fact that Florence was losing or

had already lost her mediumistic faculties. But Richet retains his absolute conviction that Katie King, investigated by Crookes, should be regarded as a genuine materialization.

It is a pity that Richet (15, p. 588), incorrectly quoting G. Delanne (4, Vol. II, p. 167), wrote in his well-known treatise and textbook of parapsychology (15, p. 588) that Crookes in the course of one of his investigations of Florence Cook held Katie King's hand in one of his own, and that hand, when he tried to retain it, melted away completely. Richet's memory played him tricks here, for the melting away of a 'spirit's' hand did not happen in the case of Katie King but during one of the sittings Crookes had with D. D. Home.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the fact that several competent investigators of paranormal phenomena who had declared themselves sceptical as regards the paranormal character of the Katie King apparition, changed their opinion after having witnessed what they believed to be genuine telekinetic or materialization phenomena produced by the mediumship of Eusapia Paladino or Stanislaw Tomczyk. In this connection it will be sufficient to quote the reaction of the prominent Geneva Professor, Th. Flournoy, as an example how one's opinion can be radically changed, once the challenged phenomenon has lost its unique character and has been perceived and observed more than once by various observers. Flournoy writes:

Ten years ago I expressed my invincible scepticism regarding the apparitions of Katie King which Mr Crookes observed (*Des Indes à la Planète Mars*, Paris et Genève, 1900, 3rd ed., p. 356). I now hasten myself to admit that I have changed my opinion since that time, and that, without pronouncing myself categorically — this of course goes without saying — on facts and events which the past has now completely placed beyond our verification, I do not at the present moment feel the same instinctive difficulty to admit them any longer. And this because I am faced by the reality of so many phenomena which so many learned men and scientists tell us have occurred. Repetition accustoms us to everything, to materializations as well as to wireless telegraphy . . . (5, p. 422).

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